

Written Testimony for the Public Health Committee

March 7, 2022

H.B. 5277 An Act Concerning the Establishment of Technical Standards for Medical Diagnostic Equipment that Promotes Accessibility in Health Care Facilities

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Megan Civitello and I am a third year medical student. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of proposed HB 5277, An Act Concerning the Establishment of Technical Standards for Medical Diagnostic Equipment that Promotes Accessibility in Health Care Facilities. I have been involved with the disability community since high school and have worked to expand my knowledge of disability history, advocacy and particularly disabilities issues in healthcare.

One fifth of adults living in Connecticut have a disability, and nearly 10% of them have a physical or mobility disability. According to those statistics, almost 55,000 people have mobility disability in our state. Furthermore, adults with disabilities in Connecticut experience a number of health disparities and are more likely to have obesity, diabetes, heart disease and engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking [1]. A study comparing health care utilization found that people with disabilities were six times more likely to see a physician 10 or more times in the last year and five times more likely to be admitted to the hospital [2]. Despite this increased utilization, nearly 75% of patients with physical disabilities had unmet medical needs. Thus it is imperative that people with disabilities have access to equitable preventative healthcare services which will ultimately decrease healthcare costs in the long run. One of the biggest barriers leading to this disparity is inaccessible medical equipment. The American with Disabilities Act was passed more than 30 years ago, yet in recent studies most physicians do not use accessible equipment for routine care of patients with chronic significant mobility limitations [3]. This violates one of the essential ethical principles we are taught in medical school; justice.

As a third year medical student, I have worked in numerous clinics and hospitals throughout the state of Connecticut and have witnessed patients with disabilities receive substandard care on multiple occasions. Patients in wheelchairs have not been weighed due to inaccessible scales. Women with disabilities have not received pap smears because of an inability to access equipment that puts them in the correct position for the exam. Patients with disabilities have their entire physical exam performed in their wheelchair which significantly limits critical physical exam maneuvers that can be important clues to a diagnosis. Through my training, I have witnessed how the lack of accessible medical equipment perpetuates a negative bias towards people with disabilities amongst healthcare workers. By not providing the tools for equitable healthcare we are further marginalizing and discriminating against people with disabilities.

As a physician in training, we take a Hippocratic Oath to mitigate our own biases and treat all patients fairly. Yet, how are we to accomplish justice without the necessary equipment to do so? This bill affords us the opportunity to have a significant impact on the lives of people with disabilities and as we all know anyone, at any time of life can develop a disability. People with

disabilities deserve equal opportunity and dignity in all aspects of their lives, but most importantly in their healthcare. Connecticut has the opportunity to serve as a forerunner of health equity and innovation by adopting the U.S. Access Board accessibility standards and taking the necessary steps to ensure its disabled citizens have quality healthcare.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

References:

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URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/connecticut.html>
2. Enforceable Accessible Medical Equipment Standards: A Necessary Means to Address the Health Care Needs of People with Mobility Disabilities. National Council on Disability. May 20, 2021. Accessed February 24, 2022.
URL: https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD_Medical_Equipment_Report_508.pdf
3. Iezzoni, L. I., Rao, S. R., Ressler, J., Bolcic-Jankovic, D., Donelan, K., Agaronnik, N., ... & Campbell, E. G. (2021). Use of accessible weight scales and examination tables/chairs for patients with significant mobility limitations by physicians nationwide. *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety*, 47(10), 615-626.